

February 28, 2023

Dear Members of the Housing Committee of Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Devon Mackay, and I am a resident of New Haven. I am speaking on behalf of myself as a student, a soon to be social worker, and a tenant in the State of Connecticut.

I stand in support of House Bill No. 6780: “An Act Concerning Tenants’ Rights.” Expanding protections for tenants in Connecticut is an important step in ensuring people across the State have access to a fundamental human right: safe and affordable housing. While not all landlords are unfair, a housing shortage allows some to wield their upper hand. This bill offers reasonable protections to help tenants secure and maintain housing. Reasonable landlords will recognize that these protections for tenants do not infringe on property owners’ fair practices. If Connecticut wants to be a place where people can afford to grow, learn, work, and thrive in community, then the State should prioritize measures that protect tenants’ rights to address the growing housing crisis.

As a student pursuing a Master’s of Social Work degree, I have navigated housing challenges both personally and professionally. I recently became a tenant when I signed a lease in New Haven after living with family for 2.5 years so that I could save money while in school. I kept a close eye on available apartments, and was continually discouraged by the cost of rental units in the New Haven area, as well as the hurdles of applying to even be considered eligible for an apartment. The process is invasive, expensive, and difficult to navigate. When competition for housing is high, applicants may have to pay to apply to multiple units, without any guarantee from the landlord that their application will be considered.

My experience of precarity is minimal when compared with some of the populations with whom I work, including people marginalized by mental illness, complex health struggles, poverty, incarceration, homelessness, age, and identity. The process of securing housing as a tenant is difficult enough. Add in these factors, and the obstacles multiply. But as social work and many mental health professions recognize, housing is at the foundation of human beings’ hierarchy of needs, along with air, water, food, and clothing. These needs must be met in order for the higher levels in the hierarchy to be reached. The subsequent levels include (in order): safety needs such as employment, resources, health, security; love and belonging from community; esteem as it relates to respect, freedom, and self-worth; and finally, self-actualization, which encompasses individuals’ desire and ability to become the most that they can be.

When looked at this way, fair and affordable housing is a stable foundation for Connecticut’s future. One where people can not only have their basic needs met, but tend to those higher needs so that we can thrive. House Bill 6780: “An Act Concerning Tenants’ Rights” is a step in this direction. I support this bill and ask the committee to do the same. Thank you to the Housing Committee for the opportunity to speak today.

Sincerely,  
Devon Mackay